

Resource 4: A Native American Responds to European Attitudes

The following are the thoughts of a Native American for the Mi'kmaq tribe who was reacting to how Europeans viewed Native Americans.

I am very surprised to see that the Europeans are not very clever. Why do people who are between 5- and 6-feet tall need houses which are 60 - 80 feet big? The places in which we live are not nearly as big and they give us all of the advantages that the European houses give e.g., the abilities to lay down, sleep, drink, eat, and have fun with ourselves and our friends.

Do you Europeans have as much cleverness as the Indians, who carry our houses and our wigwams with us so we can move easily and live wherever we please. When you Europeans go on a voyage, you cannot carry your homes on your shoulders. We take down and set up our wigwams easily wherever we go and without asking permission from anybody.

You suggest very inappropriately that our country is not very nice when compared to countries in Europe that you compare to paradises where you can get anything you want.

You also say that we are the miserable and most unhappy of people, living without religion, without manners and, in a word, without any rules like the beasts in our woods and our forests, not having bread, wine, and a thousand other comfortable things that you have in Europe.

Well, my brother, if you do not yet know the real feelings which our Indians have toward Europe, it is only fitting that I inform you now.

As miserable as we seem to be in your eyes, we consider ourselves much happier than you. We are very content with the little we have. And you are deceiving yourself if you think you can persuade us that your country is better than ours. For if Europe is the paradise you say it is, does it make sense that you would leave it and come here? And why would you leave your wives, children, relatives, and friends back in Europe? Why would you risk the storms and dangers of the ocean to come to a country that you say is strange, barbarous, and poor?

We believe that you are incomparably poorer than we are. We find all of our riches and conveniences among ourselves without exposing ourselves to the dangers in which you constantly find yourselves on your long voyages...

Which of these two is the wisest and happiest - he who is always working and only gets enough to live on with great trouble, or he who rests in comfort and finds all that he needs in the pleasure of hunting and fishing?

Learn now, my brother, once and for all...: there is no Indian who does not consider himself endlessly more happy and powerful than the Europeans. (Calloway, pp. 130-133)

A Mi'kmaq Native American (1677)
Recorded and interpreted by Chrestien LeClerq
French Missionary

Source: Calloway, Colin G. (2012) First Peoples: A Documentary Survey of American Indian History. Fourth Edition